

World  
Watch  
Research

## Kuwait: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2022

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# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
World Watch List 2022 .....	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	5
External Links - Introduction .....	5
<b>WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Kuwait .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief country details .....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	6
Brief description of the persecution situation .....	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations .....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period .....	7
External Links - Situation in brief .....	7
<b>WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Kuwait.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Links for general background information.....	8
Recent history .....	8
Political and legal landscape .....	10
Religious landscape .....	11
Economic landscape.....	13
Social and cultural landscape .....	14
Technological landscape .....	15
Security situation .....	16
Trends analysis .....	17
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	17
<b>WWL 2022: Church information / Kuwait .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Christian origins.....	18
Church spectrum today.....	19
<b>WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Kuwait .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Reporting period .....	20
Position on the World Watch List .....	20
Persecution engines .....	20
Drivers of persecution.....	22
Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	24

Christian communities and how they are affected .....	24
The Persecution pattern.....	25
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life .....	26
Violence.....	31
5 Year trends .....	33
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female .....	35
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....	36
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	36
Future outlook.....	37
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	37
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>38</b>



Man from Kuwait (c) Alamy

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

## Copyright note

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

## WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Kuwait

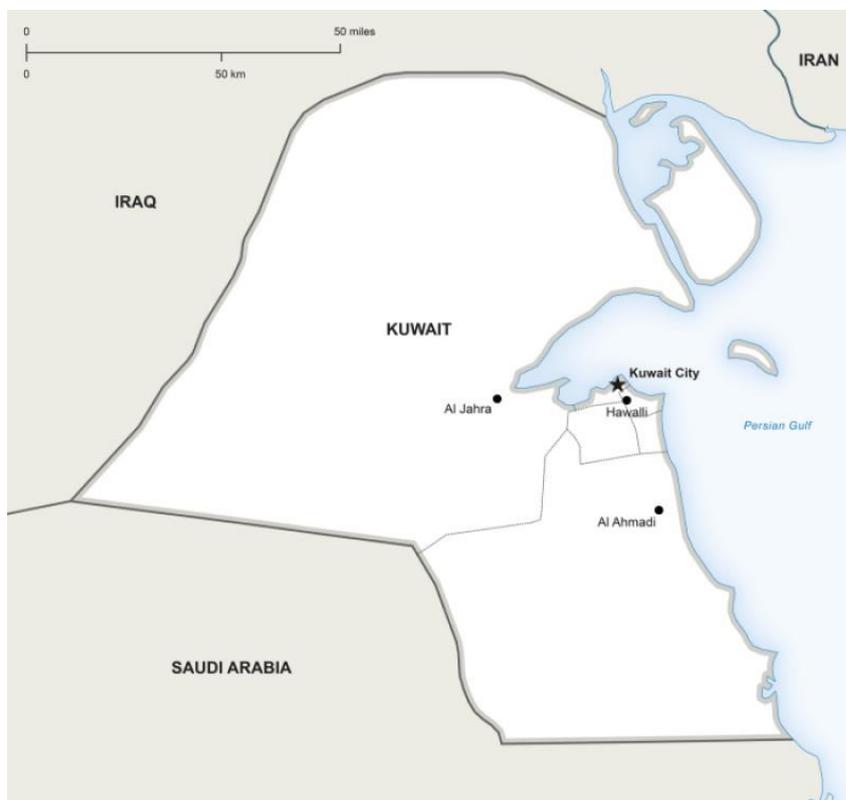
### Brief country details

Kuwait: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
4,361,000	520,000	11.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Most of the 520,000 listed above are expatriate Christians.

### Map of country



Kuwait: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	64	49
WWL 2021	63	48
WWL 2020	62	43
WWL 2019	60	43
WWL 2018	61	34

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Kuwait: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders, Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship. However, the existing places registered for worship are very small for the number of people gathering and this can lead to tension between the different Christian groups. Obtaining property for gathering for worship is extremely difficult, although informal gatherings do take place. In addition, proselytizing in any way is strictly forbidden and will lead to expulsion from the country.

Kuwaiti converts from Islam bear the brunt of persecution as they face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. They risk discrimination, harassment, the monitoring of their activities by the police, and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, conversion from Islam to another faith is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience pressure similar to that in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities. Because of the potentially severe consequences, it is almost impossible for converts to reveal their conversion, which is why there are hardly any reports of Christians being killed or harmed for their faith.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Kuwait has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Kuwait is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts experience pressure from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians are harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Ownership and consultation of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- In general, most Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity seek refuge outside the country after their conversion because of family, societal and government pressure. This is a clear indication of the existing very high levels of pressure.
- Violent incidents against Christians are rarely reported. Incidents where Christian migrant workers are targeted probably go unreported because it is in nobody's interest to go public with any details; the victim wants to keep his or her job and other actors (like the government) are not interested in recording such occurrences. Secondly, it is difficult to discern whether or not mistreatment is due to a worker's Christian faith. However, it is estimated that thousands of expatriate Christians face abuse. According to a report by [Amnesty International](#) - AI (AI, "All Work No Pay", 2019), despite promises to improve labor conditions, thousands of migrant workers still suffer from labor abuses. [In an earlier report](#) (AI, "My Sleep Is My Break", 2014), AI highlighted practices of (sexual) abuse of especially female migrant workers, many of whom are Christian. Their conclusions were reconfirmed in a recent report on the plight of domestic workers in Qatar, a neighboring country in which expatriates have to work in similar conditions ([AI, "Why do you want to rest?", 2020](#)).

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2207932019ENGLISH.PDF>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: In an earlier report - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar\\_my\\_sleep\\_is\\_my\\_break\\_final.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar_my_sleep_is_my_break_final.pdf)
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: AI, "Why do you want to rest?", 2020 - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2020-10/Report.pdf?VersionId=WnvR.WIE2vGNFiAo34DM92sa5QneV\\_5g](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2020-10/Report.pdf?VersionId=WnvR.WIE2vGNFiAo34DM92sa5QneV_5g)

## WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Kuwait

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/kuwait/report-kuwait/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/kuwait/report-kuwait/</a>	17 August 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252</a>	17 August 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-KWT.html">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-KWT.html</a>	17 August 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kuwait/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kuwait/</a>	17 August 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	17 August 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	17 August 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index Kuwait is not included)	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kuwait/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kuwait/freedom-world/2021</a>	17 August 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Kuwait is not included)	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/kuwait">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/kuwait</a>	17 August 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kuwait">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kuwait</a>	17 August 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#kw">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#kw</a>	17 August 2021
Middle East Concern Country report	MEC Kuwait report	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/kuwait/">https://meconcern.org/countries/kuwait/</a>	17 August 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/kuwait">https://rsf.org/en/kuwait</a>	17 August 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/kwt">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/kwt</a>	17 August 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KWT">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KWT</a>	17 August 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kuwait/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kuwait/</a>	17 August 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Kuwait is not included)	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://data.worldbank.org/country/kuwait">https://data.worldbank.org/country/kuwait</a>	17 August 2021

### Recent history

Kuwait became independent from Britain in 1961, with the Emir always belonging to the Al-Sabah family, which has ruled Kuwait since the mid-18th century. Oil was discovered in the 1930s which fundamentally changed Kuwait ever since. The Gulf war (1990-1991) saw Kuwait invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq and subsequently liberated by a coalition of forces led by the USA. Kuwait has become an even stronger US ally since then. In 1963, Kuwait was the first Gulf state to establish an elected parliament (BBC country profile). The Kuwaiti parliament is one of

the strongest parliaments in the region, which has frequently led to political upheaval between elected (opposition) members and the authoritarian government.

In 2011, the Arab Spring uprisings inspired some protests in Kuwait but to little effect. However, the emir-appointed prime minister and his cabinet resigned in December 2011 due to alleged corruption. In October 2012, parliament was dissolved once more due to on-going tensions between government forces and the opposition composed of Islamic and tribal factions. The political crisis continued into 2013 when the country held its third round of parliamentary elections within 16 months. In the 2016 elections, the opposition won 16 of the 50 seats ([Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2018](#)). The opposition managed to expand their numbers of seats to 24 in the 2020 elections, making up almost half of parliament. The only female MP lost her seat and none of the 29 female candidates were elected ([BBC News, 7 December 2020](#)). In March 2021, a new government was sworn in by the Emir. However, parliament wanted to question Prime-Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah, a senior member of the royal family, on corruption charges and on the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis. When he refused to be questioned, this led to a standoff with parliament. The Emir can dissolve parliament, as he has done several times in the recent past, but new elections would probably not quell the political unrest ([MDC, 11 April 2021](#), [Al-Jazeera, 25 May 2021](#), [Reuters, 29 June 2021](#)). Hence, after the second cabinet resigned within one year and fiscal reforms remained deadlocked, the Emir approved a cabinet including three opposition lawmakers, an unprecedented step ([The Arab Weekly, 28 December 2021](#)).

In September 2020, Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah died at the age of 91. He had ruled the country since 2006, but was nicknamed "the dean of Arab diplomacy" for overseeing Kuwait's foreign policy since 1963 ([BBC News, 29 September 2020](#)). He has been succeeded by his 83-year old half-brother Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed, which seems to have been a choice for continuity and stability over younger candidates of the royal family. However, following the standoff with parliament, it seems that the new Emir's relative political inexperience has led to less leverage with the opposition.

In February 2018, a [diplomatic row erupted](#) between Kuwait and the Philippines, after a Philippine domestic worker was found dead in a freezer, revealing the tip of the iceberg of domestic worker abuse (The Washington Post, 3 April 2018). In reaction, Philippine President Duterte imposed a travel ban for Philippine migrants to Kuwait. After both governments came to an agreement about worker rights in May 2018, the travel ban was lifted. The solutions include the right for Philippine domestic workers to keep their passport during employment, even when they have a day off. Under the *kafala* system, domestic workers had to hand over their passport to their employers to prevent them from potentially running away. A Kuwaiti blogger pointed out that employers invest [thousands of dollars](#) to employ such workers and publicly criticized this new arrangement and was subsequently accused of having a 'slavery mentality' (World Gulf, 23 July 2018). Abuse of domestic workers is a big problem in Kuwait but it is difficult to discern to what extent an employee's Christian faith adds to their vulnerability.

## Political and legal landscape

Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy whose head of state is the Emir of the al-Sabah family and was the first Arab country in the Gulf to have an [elected parliament](#). In May 2005 parliament gave women the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections for the 50-seat National Assembly. However, it took until the 2016 elections before the first female MP was elected. No female MP was elected during the 2020 parliamentary election.

Kuwait tries to keep a neutral position at the international level and did not join Saudi Arabia and the UAE in its boycott of Qatar. It had an active role in the reconciliation of the Qatari crisis (2017 - 2021): Emir Sheikh al-Sabah [stated](#) in October 2019 that "it is not acceptable to have a dispute among our brotherly GCC states" (Al-Jazeera, 29 October 2019). Its neutral position is also pragmatic, as Kuwait has a significant Shia minority (30%), while Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood enjoy support as well and have seats in the parliament. Hence, normalizing ties with Israel (as carried out by the UAE and Bahrain via the Abraham Accords) would most probably jeopardize stability in the country ([Reuters, 16 August 2020](#)).

Compared to other countries in the Arabian Peninsula, Kuwait generally ranks better in civil liberties and freedom of the press and Kuwaitis are proud of their tradition of active political participation. Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021 ranks Kuwait "partly free", making it an exception in the wider region. However, Human Right Watch (HRW 2021) states:

- "Kuwaiti authorities continue to use provisions in the constitution, the national security law, and the country's cybercrime law to restrict free speech and prosecute dissidents, particularly focusing on comments made on social media."
- "Kuwait is falling behind on reforming its *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which leaves migrant workers vulnerable to abuse and forced labor. "
- "The Bidun, a community of stateless people who claim Kuwaiti nationality, remain in legal limbo while the government resorts to coercion and penalizes peaceful community activism." (The term [Bidun](#) or Bidoon is not the same as Bedouin, which refers to a much larger social-cultural category of desert-dwelling, nomadic pastoralists in the region, although there is some overlap - Minority Rights Group International, accessed 12 January 2022).

Kuwait's legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Kuwait's personal status law applies to Sunni Muslims (who make up the majority of Kuwaitis) and discriminates against women with respect to marriage, divorce and child custody. Women need the permission of their male guardians to marry and work, and must legally obey their husbands ([OECD, 2019](#)). The personal status rules that apply to Shia Muslims also discriminate against women (HRW 2021). Women from a Muslim background are restricted by law from marrying a non-Muslim, making it challenging for female converts to establish a Christian family ([USDS, 2020](#)).

Legislation fails to adequately address domestic violence, violence against women or marital rape ([OECD, 2019](#)). A 2019 study revealed that several female survivors of domestic violence were sent back to their abusers upon reporting abuse (HRW 2021). A new law introduced in September 2020 on domestic violence has been widely welcomed as a positive development,

although it fails to address all areas of abuse ([HRW, 2020](#)). Escaping abusive marriages is also problematic; under Sharia law a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq* whereas a woman must file for divorce through the courts on specified grounds, often a lengthy and complicated process (Personal Status Act, 1984, Art 27).

Indigenous and expatriate Christians enjoy some protection under the Constitution, but are also limited by it. Middle East Concern states (MEC Kuwait report):

- "The constitution of Kuwait enshrines Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as a main source of legislation. However, the constitution also affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It guarantees State protection of freedom of religious practice, 'in accordance with established customs', provided that religious practice 'does not conflict with public policy or morals'. Public defamation of an officially recognised religious group or of their practices is a criminal offence. Nationality laws preclude the naturalisation of non-Muslims."

## Religious landscape

Kuwait: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	520,000	11.9
Muslim	3,612,000	82.8
Hindu	164,000	3.8
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	11,800	0.3
Atheist	720	0.0
Agnostic	35,000	0.8
Other	17,300	0.4
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020), the majority of the 1.4 million Kuwaitis (70%) are Sunni. However, a significant majority (30%) is Shia, which makes the Sunni Kuwaiti government careful in its dealings with Iran. In addition to a very small number of Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity, Kuwait has a small community of indigenous (non-convert) Christians who probably number just under 300 and originate from Turkish Christians who settled in Kuwait early in the twentieth century (see below: *Church spectrum*). The overall majority of Christians are expatriates.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Kuwait report):

- "Expatriate Christians enjoy comparative freedom in Kuwait, provided that their activities are restricted to designated compounds and, in particular, that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. Most churches find their current facilities inadequate, and church compounds are typically overcrowded on days of worship as they seek to accommodate multiple congregations of various nationalities and languages. Requests made in recent years for additional building or land have been refused. Some churches are frustrated by the limited number of visas available for clergy and staff."
- "The small number of indigenous Kuwaiti Christians (i.e. from Christian background) generally enjoy good standing in society. In 2018, a Parliamentary Committee proposed a change to legislation to allow for non-Muslims to be eligible for Kuwaiti citizenship, but that proposal did not progress."
- "Kuwaiti nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure. In extreme cases those who leave Islam can face violent responses from family members. Those considered apostates could also face imprisonment under the defamation provisions, and sanctions such as forcible divorce and removal of child custody under personal status laws overseen by Shari'a courts."

Humanist International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 30 November 2020) ranks Kuwait as having "grave violations" and notes that the Constitution limits Freedom of Religion and Belief:

- "The Constitution guarantees freedom of religious practice, nevertheless it specifies that such practice must not contravene public order or morals and must work in accordance with established customs (Article 35). The government does not recognize Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu or Sikh groups which are not included in the Islamic principle of Abrahamic faiths (ahl al-kitab: Muslims, Jews, Christians). It also denied the recognition of several Christian groups. The recognition by the state often take years for approval and is not transparent."
- During recent years, human rights activists and others have been convicted for spreading atheism and secularism.

Although Kuwait has accepted some of the major United Nations conventions on human rights (e.g. Kuwait entered the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1996) non-Islamic religions face much opposition. In 2012, a member of Parliament [announced](#) a bill to put a halt on non-Islamic places of worship being built (Arabian Business, 19 February 2012). The bill was not approved but churches still have to operate carefully. Proselytizing Muslims is both illegal and socially unacceptable and churches tend to apply self-censorship to avoid this. Criticizing Islam or the Islamic Prophet Muhammed will lead to public prosecution. Even the suggestion that the Kuwaiti Constitution should have priority over the Quran in state affairs can [lead to charges](#) and outbursts of public hatred (BBC News, 14 April 2016).

Despite the government's restrictive policies, the heavy pressure on Christians is not coming from the state authorities in the first instance: Christians have most to fear from members of Kuwait's conservative society. There is a clear dichotomy in the country between Kuwaitis (by

definition Muslim) and the many immigrant workers, even more so if the latter are Christian. As a result, due to the already existing societal abuse and discrimination, Christians frequently exercise self-restraint for safety reasons.

## Economic landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and World Bank:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$49,854 (2019 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 6.8%, with youth unemployment being 15.7% (2019), indicating the need for economic opportunities for the young population.
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** No data available, but probably low. The Kuwaiti government is known to take care of all citizens.

According to [World Bank's GCC Economic Update - April 2021](#):

- **General situation:** "Kuwait is still adapting to the twin shocks of COVID-19 and slump in oil prices that hard-hit its economy and fiscal and external positions. As fiscal deficits persist in the medium term, and in the absence of a new debt legislation, drawdowns from sovereign assets will be inevitable, potentially without concomitant reforms. Friction between the executive and legislative branches, delays in vaccination rollout to the entire population, and renewed down-ward pressure on oil prices are all key downside risks to the outlook."
- **Economic growth:** "The economy is expected to recover with 2.4% growth in 2021, driven by a more accelerated pick up in global energy demand and prices while oil production levels continue to lag, growing only at 0.2%, in agreement with OPEC+ commitment. As the vaccination program gains more momentum and COVID-related restrictions are further eased, non-oil sectors will continue its growth trajectory, estimated to reach 4.4% in 2021 to reflect stronger domestic demand. Over the medium term, growth will recover even further with continued public spending and credit growth, averaging around 3.2%. Inflation is anticipated to pick up as economic activity recovers."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region](#) report (accessed 14 August 2021) puts the Kuwaiti economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2021) shows deterioration in the economic indicators on average following the COVID-19 crisis. However, "Human Flight and Brain Drain" kept decreasing and remained relatively low.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2021) writes: "In early March an Emiri decree was issued appointing a new cabinet however political tension will continue to simmer, constraining policymaking. The initial economic recovery from the pandemic will be muted. The reversal of OPEC-mandated oil output cuts in 2022 will boost growth in 2022-23, to an average of 5.5% a year."
- The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI 2020) states: "Kuwait's economy is highly dependent on oil and lacks diversity. Therefore, revenues are volatile and affected by oil price fluctuations. The drastic fall in the value of crude oil from mid-2014 to 2017 impacted GDP performance considerably. ... nominal GDP declined almost by 33%, from \$164 billion

in 2013 to \$110 billion in 2016 ... reducing the contribution of oil to GDP from 66% in 2013 to 41% in 2016. With assets valued at \$592 billion, the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute ranks the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) the fourth wealthiest sovereign wealth fund in the world."

Oil and gas wealth has eliminated much poverty in Kuwait, although poverty among expatriate workers is probably under-reported. High oil prices led to significant growth until the global financial crisis started in 2008 and heavily affected the country's economic performance. Nevertheless, Kuwait remains a relatively wealthy country, although the COVID-19 crisis created extra concerns on top of the low oil prices. Until now, its vast financial reserves have mitigated the budget deficits in recent years.

Women are among the most economically vulnerable in Kuwait, in part due to reduced employment opportunities and patrilineal inheritance practices ([OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index, 2019](#)). Under Sharia rules of inheritance, daughters inherit half that of a son (Personal Status Act, 1984). The labor force participation rate for women stands at 49.7%, compared to 87.5% for men (UNDP, HDI 2020).

Although probably not primarily faith-related, Christian expatriates do experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other ways of unfair treatment. Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity are very likely to face economic pressure. There is high chance they will lose employment and economic benefits provided by the state.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Kuwaiti population are from Arab descent. Other ethnicities include other Arab, Asian and African groups, among the wide variety of ethnicities that can be found within the expatriate community.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with English being widely spoken as well.
- **Urban population:** In 2021, 100% of the population lived in urban areas, with an annual urbanization rate of 1.35%.
- **Literacy rate:** 96.1% of the population can read and write; with a small difference between men (96.7%) and women (94.9%)
- **Population/age:** The total population is around 4.4 million, with immigrants making up nearly 70.0% of the total population (2019 est.). The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 39% of the population, making it another country in the wider region with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 92,000 stateless persons reside in Kuwait. They belong mostly to the Bidun or Bidoon, descendants of (minor) Bedouin tribes who were not registered after Kuwait became an independent country (see above: Political and legal landscape).
- **Life expectancy:** 78.9 years on average; women (80.4 years), men (77.4 years).

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (HDI 2020):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Kuwait ranks #64 out 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Education:** On average, Kuwaitis are expected to have 14.2 years of schooling.
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 0.983, women are only slightly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Society in Kuwait continues to be Islamic, patriarchal, conservative and organized along tribal lines. Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. According to Humanist International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 30 November 2020), women face discrimination in law and practice. There are no laws against domestic violence or marital rape. According to the law, a male citizen of any religion transmits citizenship to their children. A Kuwaiti woman requires the permission of her father to marry. A Muslim man is allowed to marry Muslim, Jewish or Christian women; a female Muslim can only marry a Muslim man in accordance with Islamic law. The children have to be brought up in their father's faith and Islamic law is applied in marital disputes.

Under the official *kafala* sponsorship system, domestic workers were tied to their employers, who confiscated their passport and often forced them to work excessive hours. This left them vulnerable to abuse and has since been adapted (see above: *Recent History*). According to Amnesty International, the government has acted against abusive employers and human traffickers in recent years (AI 2021).

Although not primarily faith-related, Christians in Kuwait do experience discrimination or abuse. Skin colour and ethnical background play a significant role in determining who is vulnerable for abuse: Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. In addition, high-skilled expatriates will face less difficulties than low-skilled migrants. In short, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African background will be most vulnerable in Kuwait. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of domestic violence increased. The situation for migrant workers also worsened, as migrants found themselves at heightened risk of abuse by employers due to lockdown restrictions (HRW 2021).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 98.3% penetration (June 2021)
- **Facebook usage:** 97.5% penetration (June 2021)  
[Napoloen Cat \(2019\)](#) reports that 71.6% of Facebook users are men and 28.4% are women.

According to World Bank's Country profile (2020):

- **Mobile phone usage:** 174.2 per 100 people

According to Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021, the advancement of communication technology and the increased use of social media has not led to an increased level of freedom of speech. The report states:

- "Freedom of expression is curtailed by state surveillance and the criminalization of some forms of critical speech, especially if it touches on the emir or the rulers of other Arab countries. The cybercrimes law that took effect in 2016 imposes prison sentences of up to 10 years as well as fines for online speech that criticizes the emir, judicial officials, religious figures, or foreign leaders."

Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2020) describes the freedom of the press as highly restricted:

- "The vaguely-worded provisions of a cyber-crime law that took effect in January 2016 pose a threat to bloggers and online journalists who post any critical content. And an electronic media law adopted the same month forces them to apply to the government for a license. ... The restrictions are reflected in online censorship and in arrests and convictions of bloggers and online activists, who are accused of destabilizing Kuwait if they make any disparaging comment about the emir, his family, its allies or religion. Al Watan TV's closure in January 2015 for 'anti-government' comments and the 25-year jail sentence passed in absentia in early 2018 on the London-based Kuwaiti blogger Abdallah Saleh for insulting Kuwait's allies sent a very clear signal to Kuwaiti dissidents."

Like everyone else in Kuwait, Christians have to be careful when expressing their views (whether online or offline). Criticizing the Emir or Islam, or sharing material that can be perceived as proselytism can lead to deportation for expatriate Christians. The (non-convert) indigenous Kuwaiti Christian community is in a similar situation as expatriate Christians. However, Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity have to hide themselves and can only be active on the Internet anonymously.

## Security situation

The security situation in Kuwait is stable. In the aftermath of the Iraqi-Kuwait war in 1990-91, Kuwait's security forces received training from Western countries to counter criminal, terrorist and foreign threats confidently. Even amid the heightened tensions between the USA and Iran in recent years, Kuwait seemed unaffected, despite the fact that around 30% of the population is Shiite.

As with neighboring countries, Kuwaiti citizens have been among fighters of the Islamic State group (IS) abroad, but this has not led to any attack in the country itself.

Christians are in general safe from violence and crime, as the country is well policed and violent religious groups or others who might endanger public safety have been successfully suppressed.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Although Kuwaiti society is Islamically conservative, there are liberal influences emerging

The conservative nature of society has produced an environment which is basically hostile to convert Christians from a Muslim background. The government is likely to allow this to continue (so long as it does not feel challenged in its administration of power) in order to appease the radical Islamic groups in society. However, there is also a growing influence of more liberal youth, especially coming from the large numbers of Kuwaitis who have studied abroad. This is encouraging for the Christian communities who are hopeful that the degree of acceptance will continue and be reinforced - but there is still a long way to go before the right to change one's religion is granted or respected. Converts with a Muslim background will continue to face pressure.

### 2) Foreign Christian workers are likely to continue coming to the country regardless of the existing pressure

As long as the country maintains its openness to the world economy, Christian workers are likely to continue coming to the country. Despite the regional turmoil (such as the tensions between Iran and the USA and the ongoing civil war in Yemen), Kuwait has been politically stable during the WWL 2022 reporting period and there has been no significant rise in levels of persecution. However, the fear among Christians (especially converts) will continue as the general environment is basically hostile. Radical Islamic groups will keep trying to leave their mark on society, and the government looks as if it will allow this as long as its authority is not openly challenged by those groups. This will probably not deter Christian workers from abroad continuing to take up employment.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2018 - [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1427395/488311\\_en.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1427395/488311_en.pdf)
- Recent history: BBC News, 7 December 2020 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-55212642>
- Recent history: MDC, 11 April 2021 - <https://dayan.org/content/kuwaits-new-government-political-system-crisis>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 25 May 2021 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/25/kuwait-political-standoff-escalates-in-game-of-musical-chairs>
- Recent history: Reuters, 29 June 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/kuwait-parliament-approves-2021-2022-budget-speaker-2021-06-22/>
- Recent history: The Arab Weekly, 28 December 2021 - <https://thearabweekly.com/kuwait-includes-opposition-lawmakers-new-cabinet>
- Recent history: (BBC News, 29 September 2020) - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-54340988>
- Recent history: diplomatic row erupted - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?utm\\_term=.2f4ea1628ab7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?utm_term=.2f4ea1628ab7)
- Recent history: thousands of dollars - <https://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwaiti-blogger-under-fire-over-comments-on-filipinos-1.2255665>
- Political and legal landscape: elected parliament - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14644252>
- Political and legal landscape: stated - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/kuwait-emir-gulf-dispute-longer-acceptable-tolerable-191029095032440.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Reuters, 16 August 2020 - <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-israel-emirates-kuwait/kuwait-position-towards-israel-unchanged-al-qabas-newspaper-idUSKCN25C0A0>

- Political and legal landscape: Bidun - <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/bidoon/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KW.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: USDS, 2020 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kuwait/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KW.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: HRW, 2020 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/29/domestic-violence-law-signals-hope-kuwait-women>
- Religious landscape description: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Religious landscape description: announced - <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/kuwaiti-mps-call-for-ban-on-construction-of-churches-445971.html>
- Religious landscape description: lead to charges - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36046706>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's GCC Economic Update - April 2021: - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/publication/economic-update-april-2021>
- Economic landscape: World by Income and Region - <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html>
- Economic landscape: OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KW.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KWT>
- Social and cultural landscape: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Technological landscape: Napoloen Cat (2019) - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-kuwait/2019/02>

## WWL 2022: Church information / Kuwait

### Christian origins

The earliest signs of Christian presence in Kuwait are the ruins of churches on the offshore islands Failaka and Akkaz. Archaeologists date these churches between the 5th and the 9th centuries. If this latter date is correct, Christianity survived the conquest by Islam longer than often assumed. (Islamic tradition - which is increasingly being subjected to historical scrutiny - sets the date of conquest very early at 633 AD.) The site in Failaka was a monastery with a church surrounded by a densely settled area and formed the focal part of a Nestorian community that lived on the island. The Kingdom of Hirah north of Kuwait had a large Nestorian population. By the 10th century these sites had been vacated and, from then on, there is no record of a Christian presence in Kuwait for almost a millennium. However, the country's position in the Arabic and Ottoman empires makes it highly likely that, at times, Christians from other parts of those empires lived and worked in Kuwait.

Only after the Sheikhdome became a British protectorate in 1899, could mission work begin in Kuwait. Samuel Zwemer of the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church in America moved to Kuwait in 1903 and opened a Bible shop. The National Evangelical Church of Kuwait was organized that same year, though it did not have a building for worship until 1926. In 1910 the Mission also opened a clinic that developed into a hospital for men; a hospital for women followed.

After the discovery of oil in 1937, migrant workers from Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, India and Egypt came to Kuwait bringing with them a diversity of churches, including Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Church of South India and other denominations.

## Church spectrum today

Kuwait: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	91,900	17.7
Catholic	405,000	77.9
Protestant	12,700	2.4
Independent	7,300	1.4
Unaffiliated	3,600	0.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>520,500</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	10,500	2.0
Renewalist movement	106,000	20.4

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The around 300 (non-convert) indigenous Christians stem from Turkish Christians who settled in Kuwait early in the twentieth century. Some of them worked together with the American Arabian Mission of Samuel Zwemer, which opened a bookshop (1903) and two hospitals (1913 / 1919) in Kuwait. Their National Evangelical Church (1931) is still present and is currently headed by a Kuwaiti Christian. Other churches followed in the 1950s and 1960s. Not surprisingly around the same time that the number of Christians began to rise with the influx of expatriate workers following Kuwait's oil-fueled 'Golden Era' (1946-1982). Today the number of Christians in Kuwait stands at 520,000, but is likely to decrease since the economic decline, accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis, is making Kuwait less welcoming to expatriates.

*(Source: Ross R K, Tadros M and Johnson T M (eds.), Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity. Christianity in North Africa and West Africa, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p. 182)*

# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Kuwait

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Kuwait: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	64	49
WWL 2021	63	48
WWL 2020	62	43
WWL 2019	60	43
WWL 2018	61	34

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The increase in score of one point in WWL 2022 was mainly caused by a rise in pressure in the *Private and Family spheres of life*. Whereas expatriate Christians are relatively free to practice their faith, converts from Islam bear the brunt of persecution as they face severe opposition from both family members and the local community.

## Persecution engines

Kuwait: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

### **Islamic oppression (Strong)**

As in many countries in the region, *Islamic oppression* is the main engine behind the persecution of Christians in Kuwait. It is operating strongly at both national and local community levels. Society is generally very conservative – with the laws and Constitution also affirming the conservative nature of society. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion and Islamic law (Sharia) is an important source for legislation. The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all pupils in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity in state-run high schools is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christian groups. In the past, a significant number of Kuwaitis were tolerant towards non-Muslim residents; however, this has begun to change due to the growing influence of radical Islamic groups, who do not want to see Christians in the country. Even though the Islamic State group (IS) has been weakened militarily, radical Islamic influence is still present and it enjoys a notable resonance among a significant number of Sunni radicals. Kuwaiti citizens are known to have fought for IS in Iraq and Syria.

Converts from Islam to Christianity, particularly those with a Kuwaiti background, face the highest levels of pressure. For converts from Pakistan or the Levant (e.g. Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Syria, among other countries), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Kuwait. As long as they do not create unrest, they have less to fear from the Kuwaiti government, although their Kuwaiti employers may decide to end their work contract, which could result in deportation if they cannot find another job. Within those expatriate communities, the consequences for converts depend more on the cultural norms from their home country, than on the cultural practices of Kuwait. For expatriates, conversion to Christianity is sometimes easier than in their home country, because family and relatives are often far away and social pressure is less stringent.

While the country tries to be open and modern, a strict interpretation of Islam continues to have its grip on society. Society and government enforce conservative Islamic customs in public, e.g. by enforcing public dress codes, prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, by limiting the freedom of expression (i.e. criticism of Islam) and by allowing other religions only to worship in private.

### **Clan oppression (Strong)**

Typical for this Persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context (such as family honor) are forced upon Christians. In the case of Kuwait, *Clan oppression* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity, especially Kuwaiti converts, because of their strong family ties. Turning away from Islam is not only regarded as religious betrayal, but also as betrayal of the family and tribe. Converts are seen as disrespecting their own fathers and grandfathers, a disloyalty which is socially unacceptable. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

## Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The government of Kuwait is restrictive in many ways. *Dictatorial paranoia* is behind most of the government restrictions on civil and political freedoms, as the country's ruling family does not want their hegemony threatened in any way. Freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association are thus restricted. This also effect Christians and churches in the country: In order to maintain the public peace, and ease radicals' and citizens' concerns about upholding Islamic values, Freedom of Religion and Belief remains restricted. Although the country has one of the strongest parliaments in the region, the ruling royal Sunni family still dictates everyday life. (In 2016, two former members of parliament, who were critical of the government and their allies, received prison sentences.)

## Drivers of persecution

Kuwait:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			STRONG				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Strong			Medium				Medium	
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong			Medium					
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium			Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Strong					
Political parties	Medium								

*The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.*

## Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** Although clearly mixed with issues of family honor, strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for families to target family members who convert to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in Kuwait. Families will most certainly expel converts from their home, as they see conversion not merely as being an attack on Islam, but also on the family honor.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Although there is no criminal penalty for conversion, it is socially unacceptable and a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized. Some Kuwaiti Christians (mostly converts from Islam to Christianity) have been interrogated by government officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced threats of losing their jobs and homes. Conversion is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status matters. For example, fathers who leave Islam are likely to lose custody of their children. Foreign Christians have to practice their faith carefully as the government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to speak about the Christian faith publicly; proselytizing is

illegal and punishable under the law. Christian expatriate workers have been interrogated and instructed not to share their faith, or risk losing their visas. No Christians have been officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** The fear of hostile pronouncements or actions by Islamic leaders contributes to the high degree of caution converts feel compelled to exercise.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** Conservative Islamic society is a significant driver of pressure against Christians in Kuwait. Employees are bound by contract to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from Southeast Asia and North Africa. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates in some cases.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Family and tribal heads will make sure that Islam is respected within their tribe or extended family. They will put pressure on family members to force converts to recant their faith.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Kuwait has one of the strongest parliaments of the Middle East. Some of the elected politicians are hardline Islamists and openly encourage the government to take action against Christians, especially converts.

#### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Although it is clear that the Islamic punishment for apostasy - capital punishment - is a key element in the reasons to persecute a convert family member, this cannot be viewed separately from the concept of 'family honor'. Age old norms (such as protecting family honor) are still intact. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is the betrayal of everything a conservative Muslim family stands for and brings shame upon the family name. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Tribal and family heads will make sure that the honor of their group is not 'defiled' by a member that converts from Islam to Christianity, which is felt as a great disgrace.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government adds to the influence of *Clan oppression* in that they work to maintain the status quo in society and its cultural practices. The government will not protect a convert against its own family, but regard any punishment as a 'family matter'.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Local imams will encourage the upholding of cultural norms, which are intertwined with Islamic principles.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** Tribalism still has a widespread influence within Kuwaiti society and the social standing of tribe and family is very important to Kuwaitis. Thus, there is social pressure to keep up societal norms in order not to shame the good name of the tribe and family.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Kuwaiti government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including how it manages religious affairs. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring activities in the country closely. Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported. Freedom House/[Global Freedom 2020](#) stated that journalists and social media users whose articles insult the Emir face prosecution, and that the government continues to stifle criticism of policies.

### Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Kuwait is a very small country with the capital (Kuwait City) being the centre of all activities. The risks that Christians face - especially converts from Islam to Christianity - depend on the sort of community Christians are part of, rather than the geographical area where they live. Kuwaiti converts face the highest risks as Kuwaitis are conservative and family ties are strong. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing. Non-Western Christians with lower levels of skills are more likely to face discrimination and abuse, especially female domestic workers. Many of these are from the Philippines. It is a matter of debate to what extent their non-Muslim faith adds to their vulnerability in the case of abuse.

### Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two are present in Kuwait:

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Of the total number of Christians in Kuwait, the majority of them are foreign workers. They are relatively free to worship. However, the existing places for meeting are very small for the number of people gathering. It is extremely difficult to obtain property for worship purposes.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020), there are seven officially recognized Christian denominations:

- The National Evangelical Church (Protestant)
- Roman Catholic
- Greek Catholic (Melkite)
- Coptic Orthodox
- Armenian Orthodox
- Greek Orthodox
- Anglican Church

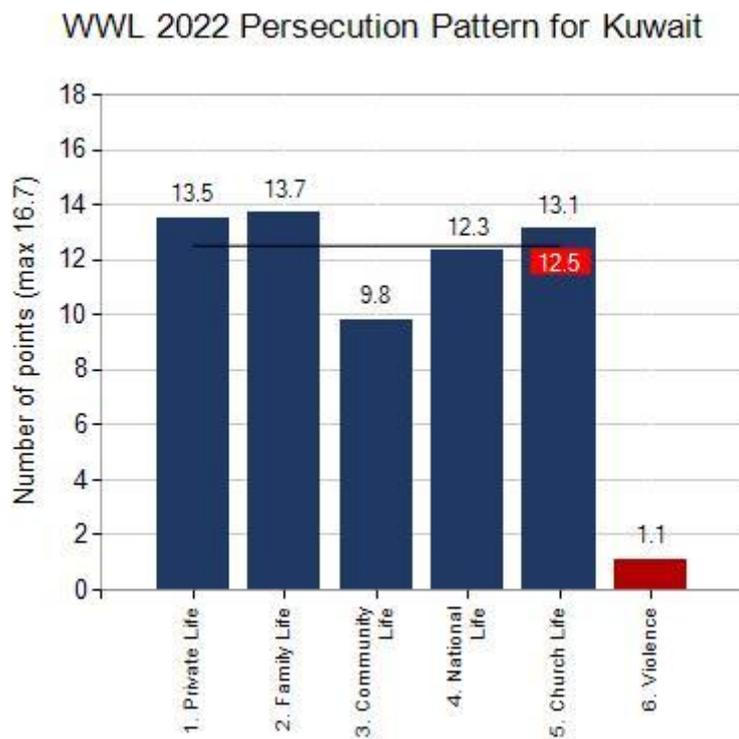
The government allows some expatriate Christian groups to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of licensed churches. They can conduct worship services without government interference provided they do not disturb neighbors or violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

**Historical Christian communities:** There is a small number of non-convert native Kuwaiti Christians residing in the country. There are reported to be 12 Christian families and a total number of not more than 300 Christians ([Al-Arabiya, 25 December 2017](#)). These do not exist as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis; they are included in the category for expatriates above.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from Islam to Christianity face daunting challenges in many forms. The main drivers of persecution are family, community members, radical Muslims and, to a lesser extent, the authorities. They risk discrimination, harassment, monitoring by police and all sorts of intimidation. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These do not exist as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis; they are included in the category for expatriates above.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Kuwait shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.5 points), rising from 12.4 in WWL 2021.
- Although all *spheres of life* show high or very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *Family, Private and Church spheres of life*. This reflects on the one hand the difficult situation for convert Christians who face very high pressure from their (extended) family and cannot have an official Christian marriage or a Christian funeral. On the other hand, church life is difficult for both converts and expatriate Christians, as proselytizing and integrating converts from a Muslim background are socially unacceptable.

- The score for violence remained 1.1 in WWL 2022. Kuwait is a typical Gulf country in that very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line' and experiences violence.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)**

In a very conservative and tribal society that regards leaving Islam as a betrayal of family values, conversion to Christianity always brings difficulties. As a result, even though the law does not formally prohibit conversion, both society and government put hurdles in the way for people who convert.

### **Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)**

Converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest risk as posting faith-related items online could lead to discovery of their conversion. Expatriate Christians cannot openly proselytize or criticize Islam online without consequences, either.

### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)**

Risks are highest for Kuwaiti converts; for non-Kuwaiti converts the level of risk depends on the specific norms of their own migrant worker community. Expatriate Christians can be accused of proselytism when speaking about their faith with Muslims, which will lead to deportation.

### **Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)**

Converts cannot wear any Christian symbol as it would be likely to lead to discovery of their faith. Expatriate Christians are sometimes careful, as publicly displaying a cross can lead to negative remarks or other types of harassment, especially when working in a Kuwaiti home (as a domestic worker, for example).

### **Block 1 - further information**

*All (religious) literature deemed offensive towards Islam is forbidden. Converts living with their family (both nuclear and extended) have difficulty worshiping or owning Christian materials as they have to be careful that they are not discovered.*

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)**

All children born to Kuwaitis are considered to be Muslim. This principle also applies to the children of Kuwaiti converts.

### **Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

A female Kuwaiti Christian from a Muslim background is only permitted by law to marry a man also born Muslim; while a man would have freedom to marry a non-Muslim - but in both cases Islamic procedures apply. Hence, celebrating the marriage between an expatriate or non-convert Kuwaiti Christian and a Kuwaiti convert in a church would be impossible.

### **Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)**

Baptisms of converts must be conducted discreetly as open baptism might attract severe abuse and harassment from family members as well as from the community at large. In addition, a baptism of a convert is clear sign of proselytism. Hence, for churches the baptism of converts remains a very sensitive topic and can never be carried out in public.

### **Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)**

Children from Kuwait's (non-convert) indigenous Christian communities do not have access to Christian education within the state school system but must attend Islamic instruction classes. Private schools, including those serving the expatriate communities, must adhere to government guidelines on curriculum content and must provide Islamic instruction. Although expatriate Christian children cannot receive Christian religious education within the school system, they can be exempted from Islamic religious education.

### **Block 2 - further information**

*Particularly converts from Islam face serious challenges living as a Christian family. The prevailing circumstances in the country also put significant restrictions on expatriate Christian families. Both have to behave carefully in public. Speaking about their beliefs is difficult and does entail risks, because proselytizing in any way is strictly forbidden. Besides this, converts bear the brunt of persecution in the family sphere. Deceased converts are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, and there are very limited facilities for expatriate Christians. The law also puts restrictions on marriage - a Muslim female may not marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts to Islam. In addition, the law states that a marriage between a Muslim and someone who renounces his or her faith (in Islam) is void. These laws have a significant implication on questions of custody and inheritance as well.*

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)**

Christians are in general monitored not only by the government but also by society, who will inform the security services if they are aware of 'suspicious circumstances'. Especially expatriates suspected of evangelism will be followed by the security services.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)**

There is always pressure on converts to renounce Christianity, also at the community level. Known converts will be ostracized, probably lose their job and will not be seen as being part of the community anymore.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.00 points)**

During the month of Ramadan, Christians struggle to cope with the de facto requirement to fast imposed by the government and community. In addition, converts from Islam to Christianity will have to take part in all Islamic religious ceremonies in order to keep their new faith a secret.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Known Kuwaiti converts would definitely be discriminated against and have great difficulty in finding employment. It is an accepted fact that Christian expatriate workers can experience discrimination on the work-floor. Their Christian faith is an extra vulnerability in this regard, although racism also often plays a very negative role.

### ***Block 3 - further information***

*In Kuwaiti communities, Christians are seen as foreigners (and infidels) and are sometimes directly or indirectly prevented from participating in community activities. Education is another area where Christians face challenges. The government requires Islamic religious instruction in state schools for all students and also in private schools that have one or more Muslim students. But the law prohibits organized religious education for faiths other than Islam in state-run schools ([Humanist International, 30 November 2020](#)).*

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### **Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

The [Constitution](#) declares that Islam is the state religion. The freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution does not meet international standards fully as it focuses purely on the observance of religious rites, which are not allowed to conflict with Kuwaiti (i.e. Islamic) morals - see Article 35. The Constitution does not guarantee the freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity.

### **Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)**

No convert from a Muslim background would apply to have their conversion officially recognized because they know that this cannot be granted (based on apostasy provisions of Islamic law) and because to make such an application would expose them to the authorities and so be extremely dangerous.

### **Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

All Christians will try to keep a low profile in order to avoid pressure. Criticizing the Kuwaiti government or Islam is not acceptable and would very likely lead to deportation for expatriate migrants. Thus, for example, speaking about social justice from a Christian perspective can only be done with great sensitivity.

### **Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)**

Only Christian organizations with a clear benefit for Kuwaiti society, such as a hospital, will be welcomed. It is impossible to establish a Christian organization with the intention of proselytizing; any organization with a clear Christian profile would be under constant suspicion and opposed.

### **Block 4 - further information**

*There are laws against proselytizing, and the government enforces them. The government also endorses a policy of funding and supporting Sunni Islam by financing Sunni mosques, imams and Sunni Islamic teaching and education. Although Kuwait does hold democratic elections, running for a public office as a non-Muslim is unthinkable. Several radical Islamic groups (as well as conservative hardline members of parliament) wish to get rid of all non-Muslim influences, such as the expatriate celebration of Christmas.*

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.75 points)**

It is possible to organize activities for Christian youth, but it is impossible to organize activities directed at Muslim youth as these will be interpreted as acts of proselytism.

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)**

The government has prohibited non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and from proselytizing Muslims. Openly integrating converts within church communities would be seen as a clear sign that proselytizing is taking place.

### **Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)**

The selling of Christian materials is only permitted at outlets within a registered church compound. The free distribution of Christian materials is not permitted outside church compounds as this would be considered to be an act of proselytization. In practice, most Christians would exercise extreme caution in distributing Christian materials, effectively exercising self-censorship. In previous years, the distribution of Christian material has led to the deportation of the expatriate offender.

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)**

As organizing public Christian activities will often be interpreted as proselytism, churches will not be allowed to organize them. Most churches apply self-censorship in this regard in order to avoid any problems with the authorities and society. Many congregations have to gather in homes as there is a lack of church space, but those churches make sure they keep a low profile.

### **Block 5 - further information**

*Church life in Kuwait is restricted. For example, to purchase a plot of land to build a church, the buyer must be a citizen of Kuwait. For converts to go and buy land for church construction would be very dangerous as this would expose their conversion to the general public. It is not uncommon that churches applying for licenses to build new places of worship have had to wait years for approval. A country researcher noted: "Most of the recognized Christian churches considered their existing facilities inadequate to serve their communities and faced significant problems in obtaining proper approvals from municipal councils to construct new facilities. Municipal authorities obstructed religious gatherings in private spaces and pressured landlords who had leased property to unlicensed churches." Besides the difficulties in obtaining church facilities, publishing religious material is also limited to one's own church congregation. The government allows churches to import religious materials, but under the condition its content does not insult Islam. Signs and symbols on the outside of church buildings are forbidden.*

## Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.** Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

**3. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. The use of symbolic numbers:** In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

**5. The symbol "x" in the table:** This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Kuwait: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- Christians attacked:** It is widely known that house-maids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of (sexual) abuse. However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interested in revealing the true situation: Kuwait needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the house-maids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their economic interests at stake. However, Philippine President Duterte did impose a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine maid was found in the [freezer](#) of a Kuwaiti home in February 2018 (Gulf News,16 February 2018).

The employers of abused house-maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The house-maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as 'dirty', whether in Kuwait itself or by their family at home. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Kuwait, and the house-maid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of sexual abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any sexual abuse is due to the house-maid being a non-Muslim.

Nevertheless, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least 10 Christian house-maids were (sexually) abused because of their faith in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

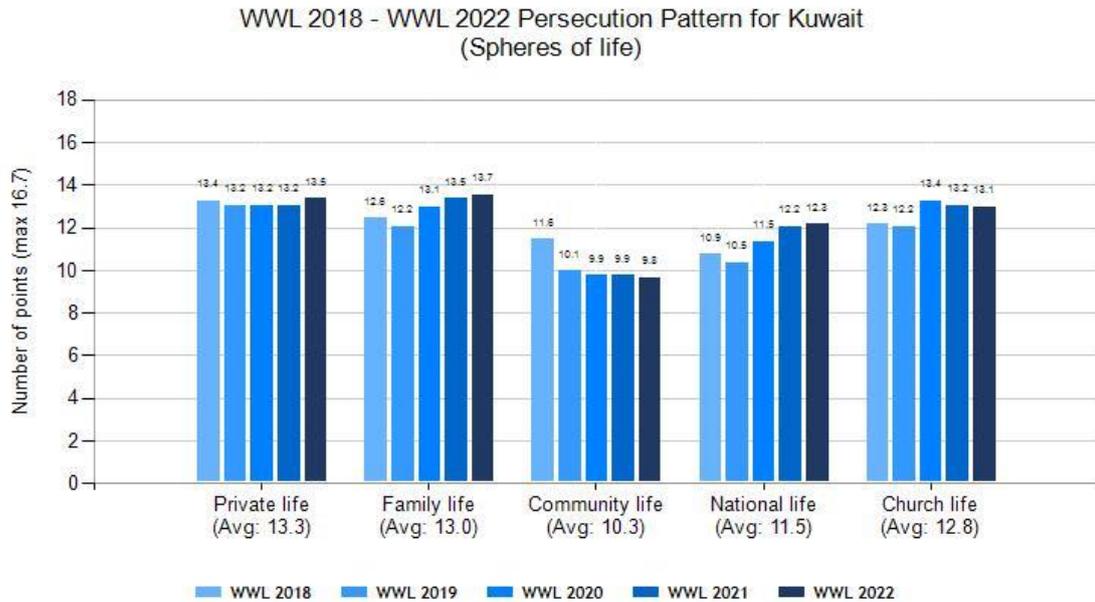
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Kuwait: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	12.5
2021	12.4
2020	12.2
2019	11.7
2018	12.2

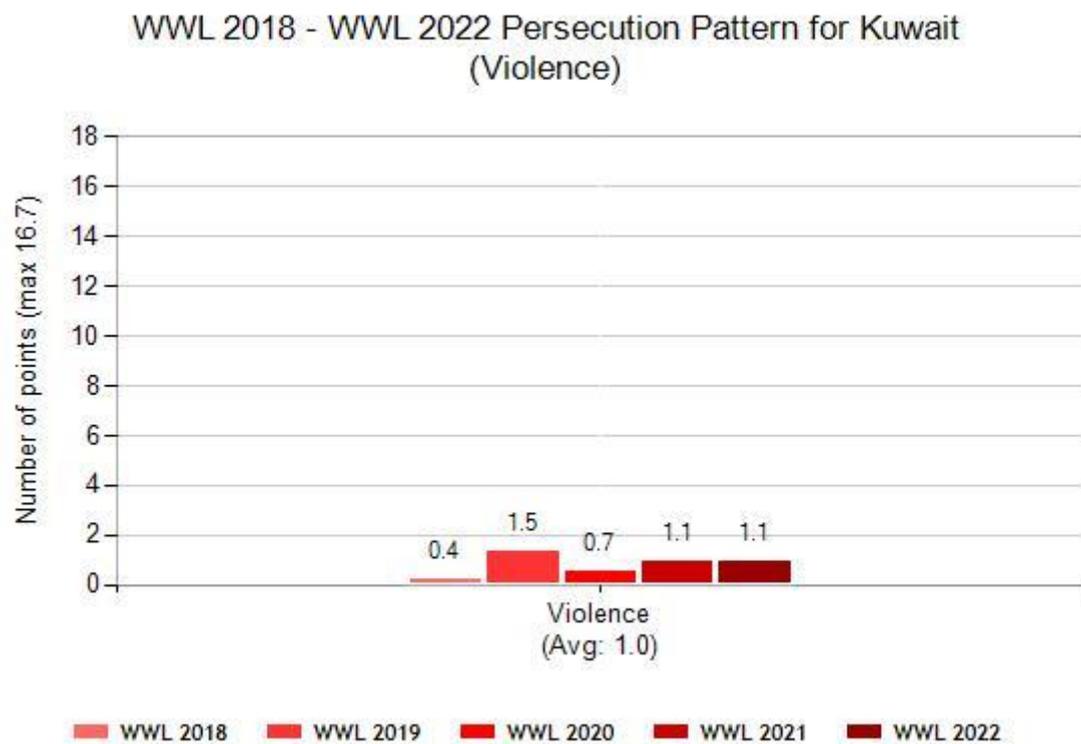
The average pressure on Christians has more or less been stable in the last five reporting periods. It now appears to be levelling off within the 11.7 - 12.5 point range.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the chart below: While the very high level of pressure in the *Private sphere of life* has been more or less stable over the last five reporting periods, there have been noticeable increases in the pressure in the *Family, National* and (though with a recent declining tendency) *Church spheres of life*. Only in *Community life* does there appear to be a trend of pressure reducing (in the last four reporting periods).



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As can be seen in the chart above: The number of violent incidents recorded in Kuwait has not changed dramatically over the years and so the violence score has remained more or less stable at a very low level (except in WWL 2019). The rise in WWL 2019 was mainly due to an increase in points scored for the abuse of expatriate domestic workers. Less cases were reported during the WWL 2020 - WWL 2022 periods, resulting in a lower score.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Many of the foreign domestic maids in Kuwait are Christian. This is significant in a country where the foreign population outnumbers the indigenous population. According to Kuwaiti delegates attending a [CEDAW review](#) in 2017, the ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, is a major issue. A country expert comments that these women are at a “heightened risk to domestic abuse and sexual assault”. As stated above (see: *Violence, Christians attacked*), statistics on the issue are scarce, as employers of abused maids or the perpetrators of the abuse have no interest in reporting, and the maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as 'dirty' within Kuwait or by their family at home.

Reports indicate that the COVID-19 lockdown has [further intensified](#) the pressure experienced by domestic workers (The Telegraph, 20 Oct 2020). House-maids working in Kuwait often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become an internationally high-profile issue. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience sexual abuse.

According to [Chatham House](#), the passing of a new family protection law is “a major step forward for a country which has long suffered from high levels of domestic abuse” (Chatham House, 16 September 2020). Time is needed however to see how effective the implementation of this law proves to be in practice. For now, experts are concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence levels.

Female Kuwaiti Christian converts will encounter severe family pressure to reject their new faith. They may be put under house arrest, pressurized to marry a Muslim or sexually harassed (although there have been no reported instances of forced marriage in the WWL 2022 reporting period). Women may also be threatened with the possibility of honor killings to restore the honor of the family following her conversion. If already married, female converts are vulnerable to being divorced by their husbands. Perhaps the most difficult law for Christian converts hoping to establish their own Christian household is that women from a Muslim background are restricted by [law](#) from marrying a non-Muslim (LOC, Prohibition of Interfaith Marriage, September 2015, p.12).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Among the small number of Kuwaiti Muslim converts to Christianity, most pressure comes from family and community – this would typically be felt most keenly by women and girls, followed by younger men and then older men, reflecting levels of status and freedom generally within the culture. In Kuwait, men who convert to Christianity fear the rejection of their immediate and extended families and the repercussions that would have on their livelihood. In this Islamic society, male converts are likely to be ostracized by their families, simultaneously losing their respect and their financial support. Often, this means that Christian men or boys are forced to leave the family home. Without family support, it is difficult for men to find or keep their job and marrying becomes almost impossible. Christian men are especially subject to discrimination and hostilities on the work-floor. The isolation of conversion is further amplified by the difficulty that converts from a Muslim background have in forming sustainable church groups.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Not only Christians have to face the sometimes oppressive hand of the government, other minorities (such as the Shia community) also experience discrimination and have to operate carefully. Although the sizeable Shia community has traditionally enjoyed greater levels of acceptance in Kuwait than in some other countries in the region, restrictions on religious freedom have increased; this is primarily due to political changes concerning Kuwait's relationship to Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, these dynamics have so far not been strong, as Kuwait tries to retain a neutral profile at the international level.

Religious groups such as Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs are relatively free to practice their faith in private, although they lack facilities to worship. Conservative groups within parliament view all non-Muslim religious activities with suspicion and regularly oppose them.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020):

- "Members of non-Abrahamic faiths and non-registered churches continued to state they remained free to practice their religion in private but faced harassment and potential prosecution if they disturbed their neighbors or violated laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. They ... avoid conflict with authorities by not proselytizing or disparaging the government or other faiths. ... they did not publicly advertise religious events or gatherings to avoid bringing unwanted attention to their organizations both from the public and from government authorities. ... Almost uniformly across these communities, members said they

lacked sufficient religious facilities and religious leaders or clerics to lead prayers, bless births and marriages, and conduct appropriate death rituals."

## Future outlook

The future of Kuwait, like that of other countries in the Gulf, is intrinsically linked to the political situation in the region. The Middle East and the Gulf region remain unpredictable. The outlook for Christians can be summarized, viewed through the lens of the main persecution engines:

### Islamic oppression

If the authorities feel compelled (for reasons of political expediency) to become more hostile towards Iran and closer to Saudi Arabia, this could potentially lead to Sunni conservatives exerting greater political influence which could result in the political climate becoming more hostile to Christians (including expatriate churches). In addition, although IS has suffered serious defeat from a military point of view, its influence still remains. The rise in Sunni radicalism has been an issue not only for Christians in the region, but also for individual country leaders and the international community. Sunni majority countries, including Kuwait, are on the alert to make sure that militant groups do not establish their networks in their country.

### Clan oppression

Although urbanization, modernization and the rise of the Internet are also a major influence on the younger generation, it is likely that clan influence will remain high. Globalization could even strengthen this factor since Kuwaitis may feel threatened and seek to protect their own identity. In such a climate, conversion from Islam to Christianity will remain a very sensitive issue.

### Dictatorial paranoia

The Kuwaiti government will continue to do everything necessary to eradicate any dissent and avoid public unrest.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Global Freedom 2020 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kuwait/freedom-world/2020>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: Al-Arabiya, 25 December 2017 - <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2016/12/27/An-inside-look-at-a-Gulf-Christian-community.html>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: Humanist International, 30 November 2020 - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points): Constitution - [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait\\_1992.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: freezer - <https://gulfnnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CEDAW review - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22341&LangID=E>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: further intensified - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/want-leave-scared-pandemic-increases-risk-violence-gulfs-domestic/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Chatham House, - <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/09/kuwait-brighter-future-beckons-domestic-violence-sufferers>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: law - <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llglrd/2018298480/2018298480.pdf>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Kuwait>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Kuwait>